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The over mountain men; some passages  
from a page of neglected history.

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To John C. Branner

With the warm regards of

David McJannet

**NOTE:**

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## THE OVER-MOUNTAIN MEN.

SOME PASSAGES FROM A PAGE OF NEGLECTED HISTORY.

BY SWAN M. BURNETT.

In the following paper I assume the rôle of an humble chronicler of sights, scenes and impressions gathered among an almost unknown people of an almost unknown land during the most critical period of our national life.

I do not mean to say that up to the breaking out of the late Civil War it was not known, even outside of the geography classes, that such a country as East Tennessee existed. Two or three things had come out from these mountains which had, at least momentarily, arrested the attention of the East and North. The *Whig* of the somewhat eccentric Parson Brownlow was largely read outside of the limits of his own section, and "Andy" Johnson, the self-educated tailor, was then serving as senator for his State in Washington. But for these and a few other men in public life even less prominent, that rock-ribbed region might have been, so far as the American people at large were concerned, an island in a far-distant sea. There was nothing to draw the eye of the world to her. Her mountains, though filled with coal and minerals, were too far from the business centres and too inaccessible to enterprise to attract the attention of the manufacturer, and her hillsides, though picturesque and healthful, could not yield as bountifully as the broad prairies of the great West; and so the tide of emigration from New England and Europe passed her by, and she was an uncounted factor in the building of the nation's greatness and strength. And even when the iron rail of our Western energy and progress had thrust itself through her stony barriers, and wound its tortuous course through her pleasant valleys, it was regarded only as a highway of travel and traffic between the northern and southern sections of the country. She raised no cotton; she had no manufactories. What place, then, could she expect to hold in a country and at a time when cotton was king and the steam engine prime minister? And yet, she was not altogether deserving of such indifference and neglect, if her past history could count for aught.

To judge of what a people are, of their possibilities and potentialities, we must take account not only of their past history, but also of the ethnic constituents that has gone into their composition.

The enduringness and strength, alike of a building and a people, depend upon the quality of its separate materials and the firmness and harmony of its construction. Estimated in this way, the people of East Tennessee, and their antecedents in western North Carolina, are entitled to a high consideration and a front rank in the esteem of the patriotic American. No section of this country can of right lay a better claim to the title of pure American than that secluded region, and to none is the debt of gratitude of the nation greater. The one fierce blow they struck for American Independence was sharp and swift, but it was decisive. Cornwallis having carried all before him in South Carolina was bent on making a junction with Howe in Virginia, and, by their conjoined forces, they hoped to bear down the army of Washington, then weakened and dispirited with defeat. The intrepid Ferguson was sent forward to open up the way by enlisting all the Tories in the king's army, capturing or putting to death all the Whigs, and laying waste the country. We all know now, from a few pages of history, how well he was performing his mission when it was suddenly and effectually brought to an end at Kings Mountain. The men that met him there were mostly the mountain men from what was then West Carolina and Southwest Virginia, who were hastily assembled at the call of those who had led them in their warrings against the Aborigines. It was no organized army; it was simply a band of freemen whom duty called together for the accomplishment of a certain work which it seemed to them was necessary to be done. In all the wars on our continent this episode has no parallel. Of the 700 men who marched on foot and horseback across the smoky mountains to meet the advancing enemy, every man was an army within himself, and on many a trying time before had been his own high private, captain and general. Danger had been his constant companion; to live meant to fight, and to shoot his Dechard rifle with an unerring certainty was the one fine art he had assiduously cultivated. It is this individuality I wish to emphasize. It was this that set this people apart and

gave them a distinction which must be recognized as a predominant trait of character. What ordinary general of experience would have dreamed of attacking an enemy of superior numbers intrenched in a position so impregnable, in the customary methods of warfare, as that selected by Ferguson? But these 700 generals were accustomed to taking overwhelming odds, and they did not consider for a moment of retiring without a stupendous effort before that which confronted them there.

The result of this undertaking is now a part of the annals of that period, though its full significance has not always been duly recognized. Of those 1100 men, above whom floated the British flag on the morning of October 7, 1780, not one escaped. All were killed, wounded or taken prisoners; and so unerring had been the aim of those Dechard rifles that the killed outnumbered the wounded. Each patriot picked his man, and each shot counted its victim. Every man was his own leader, acting upon his own judgment and responsibility. This great achievement, which is regarded now as the turn of the tide in the fortunes of war in favor of the cause of the colonies, was the outcome of the purest patriotism. They expected no reward for their perilous undertaking but victory. They were never enlisted in any regular command, never were a part of the Continental army, and never received any pay for their services. Remote from the principal scenes of action, concerned in no manner in the politics, which, then as now, was inseparable from all questions of national interest and contention, they remained quiet and unobtrusive until the time came to deal their blow, and then having dealt it with the promptness and effectiveness with which they were accustomed to doing such work, they went back to the occupations and duties which they had left momentarily for the accomplishment of this higher one.

And who were these "backwoodsmen," "over-mountain men," or "d—d banditti," as Ferguson called them?

"You do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles," and such an enterprise as that which started from Sycamore Shoals and was consummated on Kings Mountain must have been the work of men endowed with a spirit of no common order. To the possession of this high spirit of personal independence, hatred of oppression and courageous defiance of it,

these men had every right by inheritance, for each man among them carried in his veins the blood of the fierce Scotch-Irish Covenanter or the no less firm and irrepressible Huguenot. It was because of the possession of that spirit that they were there. Their ancestors had sought these wilds, not because of crimes they had committed, but because they repudiated the tyranny of the pope or king, and because they found in their seclusion that freedom of thought and action which they felt to be theirs by divine gift.

And when we read how that band stood on the banks of the Watauga, leaning on their rifles, with bared heads, in the soft September sunlight to receive the benediction of God through his venerable servant, the Rev. Samuel Doak, and how they took up the refrain of his concluding exhortation, "the sword of our Lord and of Gideon," till the mountains rang with it, it seems like an echo of a Covenanter's conclave, or a gathering of the unquenchable psalm-singing Camasards of the Cevennes.

Such was the racial composition of this people, Scotch-Irish with a goodly mixture of English and Huguenot, but clean-blooded and of pure and undefiled descent. Could any people on the face of the earth at that time boast of a nobler lineage?

When victory perched on the banner of Washington at Yorktown and the independence of the colonies was an acknowledged achievement, these people resumed their work of driving back the hostile savage and opening up their country to cultivation and civilization. It is not our purpose here to follow them in their work, to show how far they succeeded or wherein they failed in this general endeavor. There is one fact, however, which not only stands out with clear-cut distinctness, but has, in my mind, an important bearing on the events with which I propose particularly to deal, and that is that the population remained essentially the same in general characteristics, and without any important admixture from the outside from the ending of the War of the Revolution to the breaking out of the Civil War.

Immigration did not tend toward them. The German, the Scandinavian, the Southern Irishman, could find nothing in these mountains to entice them. An occasional descendant of the chevalier stock came down from Virginia, some more families of Huguenot extraction drifted up from South Carolina, and

a few families of Quakers came over from central North Carolina, but the great mass of people were of the stock of "Over-mountain Men," who marched under Shelby and Sevier. And it is with no intention of detracting from the credit or the value of the services of any who contributed to the cause of Independence, when I say that both the Catholic and the New England Puritan were conspicuous by their absence: The religion of the mountain man was then and has always been the intensest emotion that possesses him, and he is a dissenter by inheritance, by training and from principle. To worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience is the corner-stone of his creed and he could not consistently, and does not deny to anyone the same privilege he takes for himself, though he is ready to argue the question at any length and at all times. Independence of thought and action, and a feeling of individual responsibility and the courage of his convictions is the strong and positive side of his character. The other side is represented by his want of ambition and enterprise, and a kind of shiftlessness which expresses itself through a contentment with things as they are and a thankfulness that they are no worse. The great spirit of unrest which took possession of the nation at large did not penetrate to those mountain fastnesses, and he has been happy that God had given him peace and a freedom from contention in which to enjoy the liberties he holds so dear.

Spirits would now and then arise to whom this repose was irksome, and they would strike out for the farther west in search of adventure or fortune. Some of them, and among them the great Houston, one of the noblest men this country ever held, went to Texas and Missouri, some few to California, others to the prairies of Indiana and Illinois. But these were not many, and the greater part clung to their hillsides and valleys, multiplied and replenished the earth that was dearest to them, and did not heed even if they heard, the siren song of mammon which was leading captive the people on their every side. And, so while the coffers of the Northern merchant and manufacturer were bursting with their repletion, and the white cotton fields of the South were making princes of their planters and the broad prairies of the great West were waving in truly golden grain, this simple people slumbered in their mountain cradle, their one great deed of glory forgotten or remembered only as an old wife's tale.

We have heard quite a good deal in these latter years of some of their peculiarities, more especially of their forms of speech, their dense ignorance, and their superstition not far removed from those of the Aborigines whom they supplanted; and they have been studied, if we may so dignify these effusions, from the standpoint of a primitive people. This has been done mostly by the outsider who was in search of novel literary material and who has seized upon some individual specimens as types of the whole. Any dialect or form of speech peculiar to a locality is a proper and worthy object of study from the point of view of the anthropologist, for in no better way can the origin of races or families of people be studied than by tracing back certain words or methods of speaking to a common source, and should the student of linguistics investigate the common speech of this mountain people he will find many survivals of old Scotch, English or the *Langue d'Oc*, which have been lost to usage even in the country of their origin.

The power to use a dialect artistically and with effect, has not been vouchsafed to many, and it has certainly been withheld from most of those who have been tempted to deal with that of the mountains of East Tennessee and western North Carolina. The grotesque, the unusual and the bizarre are also usually unpleasant, and that is what has generally been given to us as the common speech of that region. That which is forcible, strong, picturesque and individual—and I know that there is such in it—has, with only a few exceptions, formed no part in these so called studies of dialect. But after all it is not the speech which should interest us, but the thought that lies back of it.

Of a certain kind of ignorance there was probable as much to the square mile in that country as in any other in this broad land, and particularly was this true of the coves and mountain fastnesses. There were settlements and localities, however, where the standard of culture would compare favorably with that of places much nearer the centres of civilization. But outside of these settlements a knowledge of what is contained in books was not generally considered a necessity, and no doubt was regarded by many as a hindrance rather than a help. Such knowledge was likely to breed a discontent, and discontent meant

unhappiness which often ended in a breaking away from the old ties and associations, and the seeking of that knowledge which was said to be obtainable in the lands beyond the crest of their mountain girdle, the possession of which was of questionable value in their eyes. Their fathers and grandfathers, who had redeemed the land from the wild beasts and savages and from British tyranny, had little of these acquirements; and if there was a knowledge of good there was also a knowledge of evil, while ambition was associated in their minds with unscrupulousness, selfishness and all ungodly aims and purposes and was therefore a spirit to be crushed.

They lived their lives thus in blissful ignorance of most of not only what we call the material progress of the age, but of its expanding culture, planted and harvested their crops and served and praised God in the manner of their forefathers. But ignorance is not always stupidity, poverty is not always sordid, and there is a stagnation which helps to ripeness instead of to decay, and the absence of refinement is not always associated with coarseness of spirit. These are truisms which we do not always remember, and which were forgotten by some who judged of these people in a critical hour. To those living in the busy centres, where the greed of gain or the furthering of personal ambitions make all other questions subordinate to their accomplishment, the general politics of the country is only one and generally the least significant of a number of interests which occupy their attention. But to the citizen of this remote and secluded region national politics in its broadest sense has always been a matter of great personal concern. To this people, as to most rural populations, religion and politics were not only a serious occupation, but also a diversion and a dissipation. They were the two outlets for their intellectual and emotional activities. It was a matter of great concern to this man and, he believed, to the country at large, what his opinion might be, and his vote was counted as one and he was the man who cast it and was responsible for it. Moreover, he generally constituted himself a staunch advocate of his cause and stood ready to plead it at all times and under all circumstances. Patriotism had not yet become a lost illusion to him.

The hustings or the "stump," as they preferred to call it,

was the focus from which political opinions were diffused and these discussions he followed not only with attention but with an enthusiasm which, on occasion, bordered on the violent. Respecting matters of opinion, at least, he was always in earnest and ever a partisan. To have no well-defined status or to be wavering or uncertain as to principles was an evidence of weak-mindedness which was regarded by him with contempt or pity.

These are the characteristics which have been found, I believe, to pertain to the inhabitants of the mountain regions in all parts of the world from the times of the early Greeks to the present day. Personal independence, unswervingness of purpose and a high ideality seem to be breathed in with the pure and more rarified air of the higher elevations, and self-reliance comes as a necessity from the need of its constant employment. These were the qualities, I repeat, which were predominant in these people, and their isolation only served to intensify them and more deeply root them in their sturdy natures. For the fullest exercise of them, however, there was little need anywhere during the growing days of the republic except for the development of the material interests of the country and with the mountaineer they remained a primitive sentiment which was not yet overgrown with the weeds of a worldly wisdom.

The walls of stone which bounded the horizon of their mentality may have shut out the virtues as well as the vices that accompanied the expanding growth of an energetic people, with perhaps an undue tendency towards a crass materialism, but they also held safely confined within those inherent, rough but inflexibly strong elements of character which constitute the blood and bone of every truly great and progressive nation.

But under this slothful repose there still slumbered the old strength; the inaction was not paralysis, and among these calm blue distant mountains the fire of the ancient patriotism still smouldered, ready to break forth in a fierce volcanic flame when a blow was struck at the emblem of their liberty and personal independence.

If ever a people was ready to do and die for an idea it was this one. They had done it before, they stood prepared to do it again. It matters but little in what shape that idea is formulated or how incongruous it may seem to a more worldly-wise people

or a more sophisticated generation, its central principle was the holiness of individual thought and opinion.

At last after a peace, which, with them, had been almost a lethargy, of nearly a hundred years, there came the rumblings and mutterings of what was thought by some to be an approach of the irrepressible conflict. To fully appreciate the attitude they took and the remarkable position they finally assumed in this contest, we must again call to mind that neither by blood, association nor training had they any connections of sympathy with the North. The Puritan was as far removed from them as the Catholic, and what they considered the narrowness and penuriousness of the New England character their own free, if careless and improvident, nature regarded with a high scorn. With the professional abolitionist they had not only no sympathy, but even a contempt and hatred; and to any national scheme for the compulsory abolishing of slavery their opposition was as strong and as fierce as that of the most rabid fire-eater of the South. All their feelings and affiliations were with the South. It was the pathetic and soul-stirring stories of the refugees from South Carolina who had escaped from Ferguson's tyranny and persecution which stirred their blood in the olden days and urged them to attempt the valorous deed to avenge them, and so far as they acknowledged any ties it was with Virginia and Carolina.

But when these mutterings became a distinct utterance, and it was rumored that they looked to disunion and a new flag, the old spirit of 1780 began to rouse itself to an inquiry as to its real significance. Was it intended to set up a government separate from, and in opposition to, the one which their ancestors had staked their all to found? and did they propose to abandon a flag which was the emblem at once of their independence and their union, and which typified the liberties which had been established through blood? If that was what was meant they would have none of it. This new principle of State sovereignty was to them the outgrowth of a morbid vanity and an assumption of rights and privileges which had no foundation in equity or justice or the constitution. *E pluribus unum* signified to them one nation of many people and not the agglomeration of a number of artificial divisions of territory for which all had fought alike. The interest of the whole American people was to them one and indivisible.

It was to succor suffering patriots and not the citizens of the Carolina colony that their ancestors had left their own country open to the attack of the savage and scaled the mountains to brave the common enemy on his own ground.

The preservation of the institution of slavery was not a sufficient cause in their eyes for bringing the country into a state of actual war, or even for placing the South in an attitude of armed defense. Few of them were, indeed, friends of the institution, and looked upon it as morally wrong and politically injurious; but they believed in and hoped for a gradual emancipation as the result of the awakening of the individual conscience. The simple, unsophisticated mind often sees things in a clearer, whiter light than the astute, worldlier one, whose vision is apt to be blurred and colored by the complicated interests of an intricately organized society. And thus it was that, while the whole of the South was ablaze with the flaming spirit of disunion, and was fortifying herself by ordinances of secession and the arming of her people, this sequestered section remained as an island of loyalty, impregably perched upon her rocks, while the fiery sea of fanatical pride and sectional passion lashed at her base and swept around her on every side.

With startling suddenness fell upon them the shot of that first gun at Sumter, and its echoes, rolling through their peaceful valleys, penetrated each silent cove and reverberated along every hillside and to the highest mountain tops where the "Thunder god strikes his harp of pines." The sleep of a century was rudely broken, and they aroused with a vigor to them unknown before. The fierce fire of treason, as they regarded it, was only the flame which served to light and feed the torch of their own patriotism. That they were practically unknown to the great outside world of progress, sweeping on in its resistless course in the lines it had laid down for itself, and that they were ignored, if not despised, for their benighted ignorance, were matters of no importance whatever to them. They had never been disturbed by what people thought or did not think of them. Here, at last, was something that was really worthy of an effort; something in which they felt a deep personal concern—the life and welfare of the Nation. That same world which despised them for their ignorance would doubtless jeer at them for their

Quixotic folly; but they were as indifferent to the one as they had been oblivious of the other. From that time forth one idea possessed them as with the spirit of God. It was the theme of every tongue, the matter of all converse, the burden of every prayer. All other interests were swallowed up in its engrossing importance. Nor were they the kind of people to remain quiet when great interests were at stake. At every opportunity they let themselves be heard. Twice they were allowed the privilege of expressing their sentiments at the polls, and on both occasions they declared themselves overwhelmingly against secession; and it was with a grim humor, which was highly characteristic, that after having been declared out of the Union by the State authorities, and an election was ordered for the Confederate Congress, they voted for and elected three members to the Congress at Washington, who were duly furnished by the county officials with the certificates of their election. Neither then nor at any time did they, in any way, acknowledge that they were not a part of the United States of America.

Nothing was further from the minds of the people at the beginning than a belligerent hostility to the South. They were, current opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, a people of peace, and would have preferred to remain neutral and take no active part in the contest at arms. The Southern people were their brothers, and, while they believed them to be in error and guilty of treason, they had no desire to meet them as enemies on the field of action. But it soon became evident that such a position was impossible. In a conflict of the kind as was then imminent there could be no neutral ground, and, when they finally came to understand this, their decision was expressed in no uncertain tones. If the Confederacy forced them to choose between union and disunion, between patriotism and treason, and there was no alternative but war—then it should be war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt.

Like fire among the dry sedge in autumn, the feeling spread itself, and the whole county was ablaze with patriotic resentment at the traitorous course of the South. There was but one thought. Every other consideration was lost in the all-absorbing one of how best to deal with this momentous question. They met for counsel in their towns, hamlets and cross roads; and it is a

curious fact that it was not always those who had been accepted as leaders that led. It was a veritable uprising of the people; and when a former leader dropped away, became lukewarm or went over to the cause of the Confederacy, he carried no following with him. If every prominent leader in politics in East Tennessee had at that time taken sides with the South, the great mass of the people would have still been the same. At these mass meetings the enthusiasm glowed at a fever heat, and the people resolved to stand by each other in their defiance of any oppression from the Southern government to the bitter end. A military spirit took possession of the whole country. Everywhere they formed themselves into companies and assembled for drill as in the old muster days. The few copies of the "Manual of Arms" that had been saved from the times of the militia training were taken from the shelf, and military tactics was the absorbing theme of discussion. Old swords, pistols and muskets were rooted out of the garrets, and the bore of the squirrel rifle was enlarged, by the ingenious blacksmith, to the size of a Minie bullet. Grotesque as all this may seem to us now, it was to them then a most serious business, and one which formed a part of the pressing duty of the occasion. If there was to be a war for the preservation of the Union, and they must have a share in it, it was wisdom to be prepared. They confidently believed that the Government at Washington, learning of their patriotic stand, would send to their relief, and they wished to be ready to receive it in a befitting manner. They raised the Stars and Stripes over public buildings and private houses, and even across the railroad track along which the Southern soldiers had to pass on their way to the front in Virginia. In every way that was possible they let it be known that they were for the Union under all conditions and at all hazards.

It could not be expected that the Confederacy would tolerate such a condition of affairs within what she considered her borders, and she could hardly do less than arrest the more influential of those participating in these meetings and otherwise propagating opposition to her government. Many were carried to prison, and not a few there paid the price of their patriotism with their lives. But the spirit was not quenched, and, though resistance became less open, the quiet determination not to sub-

mit to these encroachments on their rights as free men and citizens became more deeply fixed than ever.

At the very beginning some had been won over to the cause of the South, not so much from a belief in the right of secession as because of the old feeling of amity that had always existed between them and a quasi antagonistic feeling toward the North, and they felt that if they must take sides it should be with their old friends. But these were a small minority, and were mostly among the residents of the towns and the large land-holders and those who owned a number of slaves. When, however, an order was issued to disarm the Union citizens, and squads of cavalry were sent scouring the country, empowered to search the houses of all those not in sympathy with the Confederacy, all hope of reconciliation fled. The resident of the mountains and the districts remote from the railroads had not yet ceased to hold the rifle as his trusty friend, and it was usually the companion in his journeyings and the most highly prized piece of furniture in the household. In not a few dwellings an old Dechard, which had seen service at Kings Mountain or the Indian wars, reposed on the antlers of one of its victims in the place of honor over the wide-mouthed fireplace. Not even these nor the old hunting knives were spared. The Southerner had now reached a point where he could have no regard for sentiment. But this time he reckoned without his host, and forgot that these were people of the same blood as himself, and could be as bitter in their hatred and as fierce in their antagonism as he. If he thought that these uncultured barbarians, as he regarded them, would surrender tamely to the yoke of the Confederacy, and permit a disarmament before they had really offered an opposition, he must have forgotten the chief characteristics of the Scotch-Irish and the Huguenot. Submission to an authority they did not acknowledge was something which to them was an impossibility, and when the attempt was made to force it upon them they were aroused to a resentment which was as startling in its intensity as it was unexpected to the haughty Southerner, who looked to see every resistance break down before his impetuous audacity. The troops of the Confederacy were now everywhere among them. Their land was occupied by a hostile army, and without leaving their homes they found them-

selves in that anomalous and dangerous position of an enemy in their enemy's country. To accept the situation was impossible, and resistance at home had proven to be unwise, inexpedient and unpracticable. One alternative only was left to them, and that was flight. But not flight of the ordinary kind, not as a vanquished foe before a victorious enemy, not ignominiously and with a crushed spirit, as a whipped cur sneaks to his hiding-place to cover his head in cowardice and shame. Beyond the Cumberland mountains in the southeastern district of Kentucky the flag of the Union still floated, and to them this was what the Star of the East was to the shepherds of old. Instinctively and with one accord their eyes were turned toward it, and to place themselves under its protecting folds was the one universal desire.

Never was there a more remarkable instance of history repeating itself. While their forebears had forged their way, a century past, across the mountains on the southeast to meet an advancing, victoriously-elated foe, so they now silently crept through the crevices of the mountains on the northwest, not simply to elude the grasp of an enemy which was rapidly closing around them, but, more important still, to gain a vantage ground on which to organize and return and drive that enemy from their native soil. By twos and threes and in small companies of a score and less they left their homes to undertake the perilous task of passing the enemy's lines, which formed a continuous cordon along the whole length of the mountain chain. A morning would come when whole neighborhoods would awake to find themselves depopulated of their men. It was as if a swift plague had suddenly stricken them. The plow was left standing in the furrow, the oxen still bearing the yoke, the flocks were peacefully grazing on the hillside, but the husbandman and herder were nowhere to be seen. In the darkness of the night he had left them, not knowing that he should ever see them again. Wife, mother, sweetheart, children, everything that ties of blood and kinship and affection made dear to them, were left in the hands of an enemy, and an enemy who did not regard him in the light of an ordinary foe, but as a traitor and "renegade." What that meant it is hardly possible for those living either at the extreme north or south to fully understand. There

the feeling was all one way, and at least the families of the men who were serving at the front were given aid and protection when they needed it. But here they were not only without such ordinary protection, but with added dangers and perils of various kinds. The movement was confined to no class or condition of life. The preacher left his pulpit, the doctor his practice, the teacher his school, the student his books, the merchant his business. No sacrifice of self or of personal interests was too great for them to offer on the altar of their patriotism. There was, too, a leveling of creeds and beliefs, and a wiping out of social lines, which made all men equal in the one absorbing passion for the cause of the Union.

In drawing the line in such a contest as this it was inevitable that those whose immediate personal interests drew them into sympathy with the authorities that were, and those who were purchasable by one means or another, should be found on one side, while those whose souls were not for sale at any price, would be found on the other. For it must be conceded that to be in the active opposition where hope is all but forlorn, requires a moral courage of the highest order. And it is this which I claim for these people—high qualities which were manifested in no greater degree by any people anywhere, either North or South, during that terrible ordeal of fratricidal strife. If the cause they espoused triumphed they could hope for no other reward than the consciousness of duty done, while if they failed only the doom of the traitor was in store for them, and they knew their enemy well enough to understand fully what this would be. Those living at a distance from the seat of conflict may imagine they know what war means, but its full significance can be felt only by those who live amid the scenes of action. But in this instance the inconveniences, dangers and suffering were enormously increased by the fact that not only was hostility an ever-present thing there from the time the first ordinance of secession was passed till the surrender at Appomattox, but your enemy was often your nearest neighbor, or a former life-long and intimate friend, if not a kinsman and a brother. The feeling engendered bore down all previously existing landmarks of family and friendship and formed new lines on the basis only of union or disunion, loyalty or treason.

What I am here relating rests upon a knowledge gained either by personal experience and observation, or that which came to me as a part of the spirit of the time. Being in the early years of youth and at the most impressionable age when the war began and of a temperament not wholly wanting in certain qualities of perception, this picture which I now present, however incomplete in details it may be, still represents with truthfulness the actual spirit of that period, and this, I take it, is after all, the truest history. The heart of the people never quailed. Subjected to persecution, indignities and insults of all kinds, to imprisonment and murder, their proud souls ever refused to bend to the yoke of the Confederacy. After the first year of the war I believe that all the converts to the cause of the Confederacy in East Tennessee could be counted on the fingers of the two hands. Prudence may for a time have counseled silence to some, diplomacy may have led to dissimulation on occasion, but the heart-throb of the people kept music to the drums that beat under the stars and the stripes. Even in the darkest days of the nation's life, when discouragement reigned in high places of the government at Washington, this people in the heart of the Confederacy were never cast down, or discouraged. Their unshaken belief in the final triumph of the cause of the Union had something of the holy fervor of the Crusader, and had the confidence and determination of the government been equal to theirs, the contest would have been shortened by months, if not by years. At no place and under no circumstances during the entire conflict did political enthusiasm so nearly approach a religious fanaticism.

It is impossible in a paper like this to enumerate all the instances in detail, even were they known, which show forth the unquenchable loyalty of the people to the government, and their courageous determination to resist the efforts of the Confederate authorities to bring them to submission. The "refugeeing," or "renegading" as their enemies called it, to Kentucky still went persistently on. The dangers to which these parties were exposed, the hair-breadth escapes of their journeyings, and the sufferings they endured would furnish the foundation for many a stirring epic or romance.

To understand more fully the uncommon heroism of this remarkable hegira we must try to realize all the attendant cir-

cumstances. There was then none of that popular outspoken enthusiasm and sweep of public excitement calculated to rouse the feelings of local pride or more general patriotism as at both the North and the South. There were, at that period, no public gatherings at which the oratorical powers of some noted speakers could work upon their imagination and carry them off with their eloquence. There was no waving of flags, no beating of drums, no recruiting officer in brilliant uniform, no confident encouraging spirit of success refusing to recognize defeat as possible. All these were absent, and in their places were the overwhelming armed forces of their enemies, elated with their series of successes at the beginning of the contest, who browbeat them with the arrogance which that success engendered; all news to which they were generally accessible, discouraging in the extreme; looked on with suspicion and distrust, when not actually under military arrest or surveillance; public and even private expression of opinions prohibited; their private arms seized and every emblem of their beloved liberty ruthlessly torn from them, they stood stripped of every support except hope and a God-given faith in the justness of their cause, and to the promotion of that cause they were not only willing to dedicate their best service, but to risk their lives in finding an opportunity for so doing.

There was hardly a male person over fifteen years of age of Union proclivities in East Tennessee who did not, at some time, feel that he must flee for his safety, so high did the feeling run and so closely and so sharply drawn were the lines. At no time could anyone tell what an hour would bring forth. We learned to exist from day to day, from hour to hour, thankful always if the evil day was not now though it might be to-morrow.

It was humiliating to their pride that they should find themselves forced to sneak away singly and by twos and threes like thieves under the cover of darkness, and once they resolved upon the bold and hazardous plan of marching off in a large body. On the night of April 15, 1862, a company of 800 men which had been gathered by a preconcerted arrangement, principally from Jefferson county, started under the leadership of one Capps, and that night crossed the Holston river in three canoes. The next morning they pursued their march along the highway with

no attempt at concealment. At three o'clock on the afternoon of the third day, when they had reached the foot of the Cumberland mountains, about three miles above Fincastle, in Fentress county, they were overtaken by a detachment of Confederate cavalry. A conflict ensued, in which, after considerable resistance, the Unionists were overpowered and about 600 were taken as prisoners back to Knoxville, the others escaping and making their way finally to Boston and Barbersville, in Kentucky, which were the rendezvous of East Tennessee refugees. In this company were many of my school fellows, one of whom was badly wounded and left for dead on the field, and one of those taken prisoner was my bed fellow. Those captured were sent to Madison, Ga., and, after enduring for many months the sufferings of a Southern prison, such of them as survived were finally released on their parole. It is needless to say that they did not consider this parole binding, and as soon as they recovered from the effects of their imprisonment they again turned their steps toward the old flag and this time, with the wisdom learned by experience, with success.

One dramatic incident of that adventure well illustrates the indomitable spirit which possessed these men, and their unconquerable opposition to the forcible attempt of the Confederacy to subjugate them. Captain Barnett, who lived near the Flat Gap on Bay's mountain some three miles from my father's house, was most conspicuous in his defiance of the Confederate authorities and in the proclaiming of his Union sentiments. He was constantly threatened with arrest and only escaped it by his sagacity and cunning. It happened that he was one among those who were made prisoners. I knew the man and I can understand fully the deep humiliation this was to him. His proud spirit could not brook the taunts and jeers of his enemies at his defeat, and rather than face them, while crossing Clinch river he threw himself from the end of the boat and disappeared forever in the swift rushing waters.

Their willingness to do and to dare anything in the cause of the Union and against the Confederacy was shown among other ways in the attempt to burn the bridges along the line of railroad running through East Tennessee and which was the main artery of supplies for the Confederate armies in Virginia,

from the south. In this they were partially successful, and for a supposed participation in it four men were arrested, underwent the semblance of a trial and were hung, though the proof against two of them was not established, and as was afterward determined they had nothing to do with the scheme.

They never asked for mercy or a favor at the hands of the authorities, and, learning in time that justice was not one of the articles of war, they ceased to expect even that. They recognized the fact that this was war—merciless, pitiless war, and they met it as a brave people always do, unflinchingly and with fortitude.

The patience and unswerving fidelity of these people through those long, weary years, has never been surpassed, and as always is the case under such conditions, woman rose to the height of the occasion. She took the plow where it had been left standing in the furrow, she planted and cultivated the crops, often to find them appropriated, when mature, by the authorities for the use of the army, and was frequently the sole support and defense of herself and the children whose father had "refugeed" rather than to be forced to fight against his principles. It was her opportunity and she never failed to meet its requirements to the full. We have heard quite a good deal, in some recent fiction, of that mountain woman—of her ungainly figure, her sharp-featured face, her drawling speech, her narrowness of mind and her untidy habits, and in the minds of some, if not most, she is accepted as the type of the East Tennessee woman. But I, who am to the manner born, know her differently. It is of my own knowledge that I speak of her utter abnegation of self, her long suffering borne with patience, her continued battle against deferred hope, her alertness of mind and quickness of wit born of that divine love which is common to all true womanhood of high or low degree, and the unquenchable fire of her faith which burned only with the fuel furnished out of her own heart. I have seen the time when her awkward, angular and it may be unkempt, body stood forth in an heroic mold which surpassed the classic beauty of the Venus of Milo, for in it was enshrined a soul, and a soul which could "suffer and be strong." The nasal twang of that uncouth tongue has been the sweetest music that ever fell on the ears of many an escaped prisoner from Saulis-

bury, who was stealthily working his way back to the Federal lines ; more often than not it meant to him life itself.

But if it has been supposed by anyone that there is no language current among the original families of East Tennessee except the ungrammatical dialect to which we are usually treated, and that beauty of form and feature among its womenkind is conspicuous from its extreme rarity and that slatternliness is the rule in conduct as well as costume, I should like again to interpose my personal knowledge against such a gross misconception. It was the possession of those delicate sensibilities which are everywhere the necessary accompaniments of true refinement and that are based on a moral courage of the highest kind, which accentuated the sufferings of thousands of those women during that period of doubt, uncertainty and despair, but which at the same time was the bulwark of their strength, and gave them the ability to meet each shock as it came. Many of these women were now called upon to face a reality of a kind which their wildest dreams had not pictured. They had been nurtured as only a Southern woman could be, for we must ever remember that these people were in every essence of spirit Southern to their hearts' core, and that at that time the South was the last remaining stronghold of that feeling of chivalry which placed woman upon a pedestal as a thing of beauty and grace to be protected and served. The ideals of our youth not only remain the longest with us, but as seen through the mists of the receding years, become surrounded with that halo of cherished memory which makes them a part of the eternal essence of ourselves. And so it is that when, in these latter too realistic days, I have my dreams of the true, the beautiful and the good, I am again under the azure vault spanning those purple-tipped mountains and among sweet-voiced women whose untrammelled movements have all the majesty of unconscious strength, and whose eyes, carrying in their depths the tints which sank in, many generations ago, with that last sad look on the heather-covered hills of old Scotland or the purple slopes of sunny France, look back into yours frankly and confidently because they know not mistrust or fear.


From the time of the occupation of East Tennessee in 1862 by Burnside (whom all East Tennesseans regard to this day as



their Moses) until the last scattered remnants of Lee's forces passed through it on their way to their homes, it was, in whole or in part, constantly in possession by one army or the other. Its lands were laid waste and swept barren of all substance and of means of making it. Both armies lived upon it, and, worse than all, it was subjected to the raids of armed bands of guerrillas who invaded private houses under the pretence of looking for arms or Unionists, and appropriated whatever they happened to need or fancy. This position, between two armies where you are at the mercy of the marauders of both, is the very worst in which any people can find themselves. Even under the regularly constituted authority of your enemy there is something to appeal to in the commonly accepted rules and articles of war. But nothing can be more lonely and forsaken than to be absolutely without the pale of any protection. The feeling of isolation is something indescribable. One must have had such an experience to know what it is indeed to be without a country. The sky seems to be farther away, and you feel exposed to anything, from anywhere, which may descend upon you unawares at any time. It is then you experience to the fullest extent the ineffable joy and sweet comfort which the sight of the flag of your country brings to you; it is then you fully realize all it means and what it stands for to you as an individual. It is no longer a rag of bunting or silk, but the symbol of your safety and peace. And if even at this late day my heart gives a quicker throb at the sight of it, it is because of the memory of the time when it was to me what the voice of its mother is to the lost child. It is not possible for anyone who has not lived within an enemy's lines in time of war to understand fully what a feeling of real patriotism is. You are an exile in your own home. Expatriated on your native soil. The very air you breathe has an alien flavor. Familiar objects come, from association, to have a strange and it may be a hateful meaning. You sigh for something that will bring to your mind that which is really your own. An oppressive and sickening nostalgia takes possession of you, and you look longingly into the blue sky over the purple mountain tops, almost hating them for separating you from that which you wish most in the whole world to see. It was no wonder then that some of these lonely women made for themselves

flags emblematic of their faith which they took secretly from their hiding places in hours of darkness and caressed, often with tears, as a devotée would the relic of a patron saint. Such things may be pitifully or incredulously smiled at now, or even a sneer of contempt may curl the lips at the suggestion of such sentimentality, the outcome of an ignorance and superstition so much at variance with the *fin de siècle* spirit which, we are everywhere told, rules the hour. But there are still some among us that think not so, and who regard this feeling and its kindred ones as the saving grace which is to render the closing years of this century worthy of those of the last. At no place on earth and at no time in its history, can independence of thought, firmness of conviction and courage in upholding opinions founded upon a broad patriotism make for such good as in this country and at this hour. That this people in their secluded land offered, in the most perilous time of our national history, such qualities is now a part of the veracious history of that period, and I have esteemed it my duty as well as my pleasure to bear such testimony as I have now inadequately offered to that fact, based upon my own knowledge of the events as they occurred, and the impressions made on me by the ruling spirit of patriotism that prevailed at the time and which possessed them in a degree not surpassed in the history of any people.

Of the luxuries of life there was a total absence; of the ordinary comforts there were only a few, and at times the common necessities were wanting, and yet of these deprivations no word of complaint was ever uttered. The success of the Union arms was the one absorbing desire in which every other feeling was lost. To the furthering of this they gave of every thing they had. They spared nothing, neither their possessions, their lives nor their loves, and it is a matter of record that more than 20,000 of them were enrolled in the Union army, aside from the large number that served as scouts and in other independent capacities, and whenever the opportunity offered they proved themselves the equal of any in courage, endurance and the other qualities of good soldiers. And I should like to record here to the credit of my native village of New Market and its immediate vicinity,



that they furnished to the Union army, five lieutenant-colonels, one major, five captains, two adjutants and four lieutenants. Seven of these were my school fellows and all my personal, and most of them my intimate, friends.

When at the end of the four years the survivors returned to their homes, they found a desolated country in which to make once more the start in life. But this did not daunt them and, thankful that peace had once again spread her white wings over the land under the stars and stripes, they set forward with cheerfulness to mark out the lines on which to build anew those homes they had been forced to leave, with heavy hearts and forbodings only of evil. But their country was no longer the same. It had lost its essential character of isolation, and had become a recognized interger in the new and redeemed republic. Having been the theatre of war for four years, soldiers from every State in the North and West had at some time served among them, and many, attracted by its agreeable climate and natural resources returned, after the declaration of peace, to make it their home. It is fast becoming gridironed by railroads, and the smoke of its many furnaces is blackening its clear sky. But whatever the future may hold for her people, let us hope that the traditions of her century of isolation may not be entirely lost and that she may ever remain simple in faith, honest in purpose, patriotic in feeling, and courageous in support of it.

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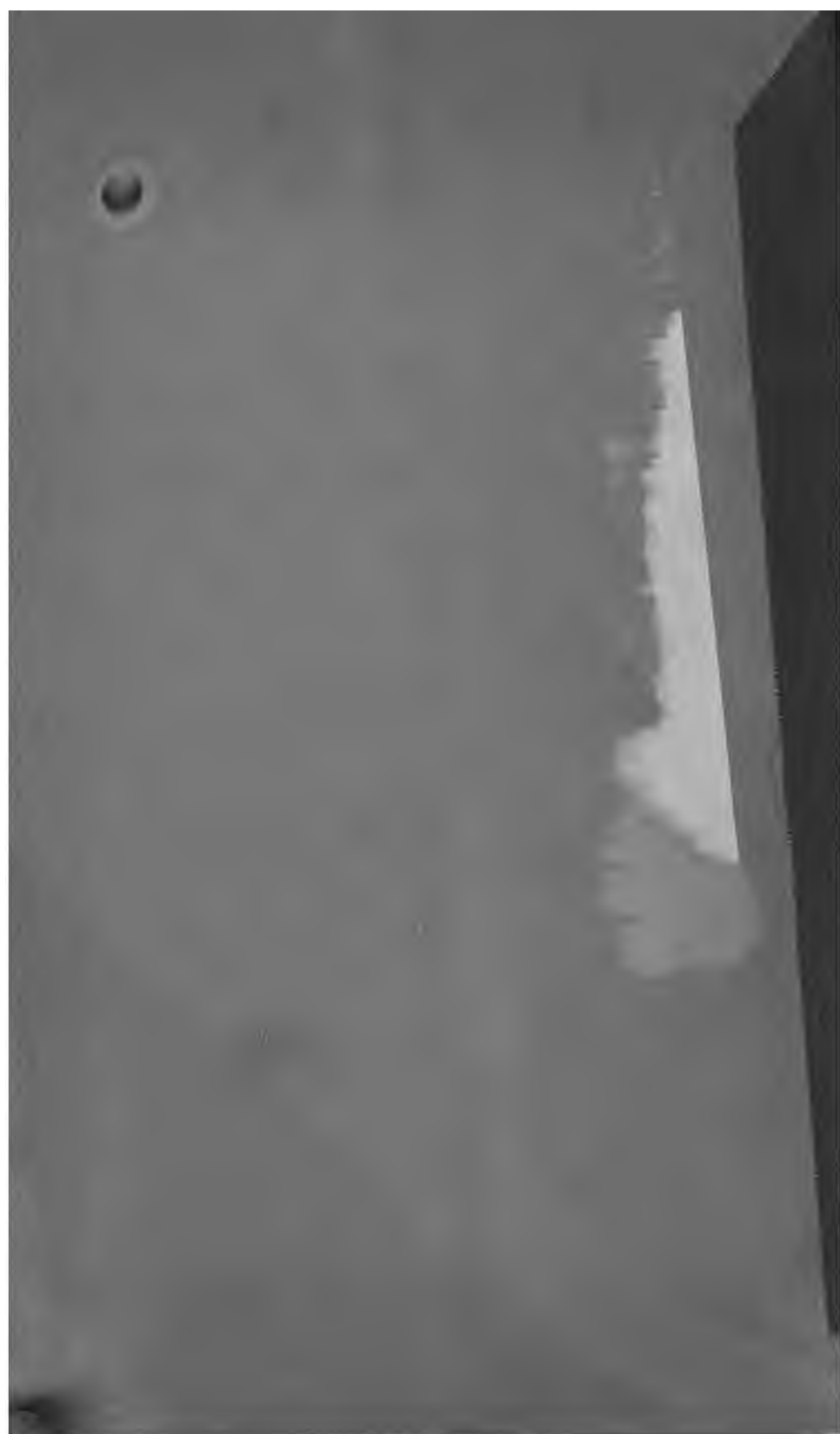
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